

## How does my doctor know if I have colon polyps?

Your doctor may use the following to find out if you have colon polyps:

- medical and family history
- physical exam
- stool test
- **flexible sigmoidoscopy**
- **colonoscopy**
- **virtual** colonoscopy
- lower **gastrointestinal** (GI) series

Doctors may also find polyps while testing for other problems.

## Medical and Family History

Taking a medical and family history is one of the first things a doctor may do to help determine which test is best for you.

## Physical Exam

After taking a medical and family history, your doctor will perform a physical exam. During a physical exam, a doctor usually

- examines your body
- uses a stethoscope to listen to sounds in your **abdomen**—the area between the chest and hips
- taps on specific areas of your body



## **Stool Test**

A stool test is the analysis of a sample of stool. Your doctor will give you a test kit and instructions. For some tests, you may need to change your diet for a few days before the test. You return the test kit to your doctor or to a commercial facility that will send the sample to a lab for analysis. Stool tests can show the presence of blood or other signs of colon polyps.

## **Flexible Sigmoidoscopy**

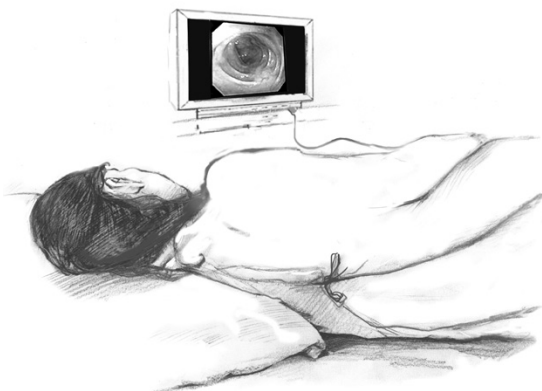
Flexible sigmoidoscopy is a test that uses a flexible, narrow tube with a light and tiny camera on one end to look inside the rectum and the lower colon. This tube is called a sigmoidoscope. The test can show irritated or swollen tissue, ulcers, and polyps. A doctor performs this test at a hospital, a health care facility, or an office. Most people will not need a sedative for the test.

For the test, you will lie on a table while your doctor inserts a flexible tube into your anus. A small camera on the tube sends a video image of the intestinal lining to a computer screen. The tube has a tool that can remove polyps. Your doctor usually removes polyps found during flexible sigmoidoscopy. A pathologist—a doctor who specializes in diagnosing diseases—will check the tissue for cancer.

## Colonoscopy

Colonoscopy is a test that uses a long, flexible, narrow tube with a light and tiny camera on one end to look inside the rectum and entire colon. This tube is called a colonoscope. Colonoscopy can show irritated or swollen tissue, ulcers, and polyps. A **gastroenterologist**—a doctor who specializes in digestive diseases—performs this test at a hospital or an outpatient center. In most cases, you will receive sedation and pain medicines to help you relax for the test.

For the test, you will lie on a table while your doctor inserts a flexible tube into your anus. A small camera on the tube sends a video image of the intestinal lining to a computer screen. The tube has a tool that can remove polyps. Your doctor usually removes polyps found during colonoscopy. A pathologist will check the tissue for cancer.



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Colonoscopy or flexible sigmoidoscopy testing

## Virtual Colonoscopy

This test uses **computerized tomography (CT)** to look inside the rectum and colon. CT machines use a combination of x rays and computer technology to create images. Virtual colonoscopy can show irritated or swollen tissue, ulcers, and polyps. A **radiologist**—a doctor who specializes in medical imaging—performs the test at a hospital or an outpatient center.

For the test, you will lie on a table while the radiologist inserts a thin tube into your anus and rectum. The tube inflates the intestine with air for a better view. The table will slide into a tunnel-shaped device where the radiologist takes x rays.

## Lower Gastrointestinal Series

A lower GI series uses x rays and a chalky liquid called **barium** to look at your large intestine. An x-ray technician performs the test at a hospital or an outpatient center.

For the test, you will lie on a table while your doctor inserts a flexible tube into your anus. A radiologist will fill your large intestine with barium and air, which makes polyps show up more clearly on x rays.

Barium liquid in your GI tract causes stools to be white or light colored for a few days after the test. Your doctor will tell you about eating and drinking after the test.

A radiologist will review the x rays and send the results to your doctor.